1 Introduction to Mendelssohn's *Pope a Metaphysician!* [1931]

The pamphlet *Pope a Metaphysician!* was composed by Lessing and Mendelssohn jointly. The occasion for its emergence was the Berlin Academy's prize competition, set in 1753 for 1755, which called for the comparison of the Popeian principle "All is good"[2] with the (Leibnizian) system of Optimism[3] and for the examination of the "Popeian system" for its soundness. To the end—the entries had to be sent in by January 1, 1755[4]—the authors intended to participate in the call for entries; that is probably why the working out of the writing[5] was completed by and large at the end of 1754. Even before Mendelssohn's "refusal to add his name to it," however, Lessing determined that they would forgo submitting the writing as an entry[6] and would publish it as a pamphlet. It is not to be ruled out that Lessing, once he had so decided, added to the writing a few scathing statements against the Academy, which would have been out of place in an entry. The writing appeared anonymously in the late autumn of 1755.[7] Nothing was known initially of Mendelssohn's collaboration: Lessing passed as the sole {xvi} author.[8]

While the prize question itself does not have a prehistory, Lessing-

1. JA II xv–xx; LSGS II 467–72. LS cites "Pope ein Metaphysiker!" in JA II 47–80; henceforth, *Pope!* followed by page and line numbers. Interpolations inside square brackets in quotations in LS's text are LS's; those in LS's annotations are the translator's. Unless otherwise noted, emphases in LS's quotations are LS's.

2. Cf. IPM xvin9, below.

3. Cf. IPM xviin15, below.

4. See Formey, *Nouvelle Bibliothèque Germanique, ou Histoire Littéraire* 12 (Amsterdam, 1753), 458. {LS}

5. Ger.: *Schrift*. In the first sentence, above (and at IPM xvi and xviin15, below), "pamphlet" is *Streitschrift*—though in the sentence immediately following this one, it is *Pamphlet*. LS refrains from calling this or any other writing of Mendelssohn's a "book" (*Buch*), except for *Morning Hours*—and even then, mainly in reference to its emergence rather than its content (see IMH xlv–xlvii, xlix, lxxiv, lxxvii; cf. xxxi, liv–lv, lxxiv). On the other hand, he speaks of the three "books" of Plato's *Republic* that Mendelssohn translated, and of the inability or unwillingness of Mendelssohn's Jewish contemporaries to read "books" written in German (IP xv; IS xl).

6. Letter from Lessing of February 18, 1755 [JA XI 14]. {LS}

7. Letter to Lessing of November 19, 1755 [JA XI 21]. {LS; JA II xv has "February 19."}

8. Letter to Lessing of December 26, 1755 [JA XI 27–28]; *Mélanges Littéraires et Philosophiques* 1755, *Nouvelles Littéraires*, no. 3.7; Hamann to Lindner, see Heinrich Weber, *Neue Hamanniana* (Munich, 1905), 38–40. {LS}

Mendelssohn's response to it has the following one. *An Essay on Man*, the didactic poem of Alexander Pope in which the principle posed for discussion by the Academy, "*All is right*,"[9] is articulated and justified, had been attacked right after its appearance—it appeared in 1733–34—by the mathematician and philosopher Jean Pierre de Crousaz[10] of Lausanne on account of the "dangerous" doctrines stated in it, above all on account of the Determinism purportedly taken over from Leibniz. The Pope interpreter William Warburton[11] defended the poet against this attack by, among other things, contesting any dependence of Pope's on Leibniz. The recollection of this controversy had no influence, so it appears, on the setting up of the prize competition; Prémontval,[12] at least, gives assurances that he had been made aware of Crousaz's polemic against Pope and Leibniz only by Gottsched's pamphlet directed against the prize competition.[13] On the other hand, Lessing and Mendelssohn, perhaps first alerted to the earlier controversy by Gottsched as well, saw themselves prompted to take their stance. They could not pass up Gottsched's own thesis either. This Leibnizian had made the assertion—patent in light of the Academy's hostility toward Leibniz, accepted by our authors, and today generally recognized as correct—that with its prize competition the Academy wanted to promote a contesting of

9. Here LS quotes Pope in English, whereas the Berlin Academy's own way of stating the principle at issue in its announcement of the contest was "All is good" (as LS reports in the second sentence of the previous paragraph). Lessing and Mendelssohn begin *Pope a Metaphysician!* by quoting (in German) the beginning of the Academy's announcement as follows: "The Academy is asking for an investigation of the *Popeian system* that is contained in the principle *All is good*" (*Pope!* 47.1–2; the emphases are in the original). For the Academy's fuller announcement in its original French, see appendix 2, supplement to IPM XVIIn16. Lessing and Mendelssohn go on to criticize, among other things, the Academy's failure to take into account the difference between "right" and "good" (*Pope!* 60.10ff.).

10. On Crousaz, see the following note.

11. In letters to the editor of the journal *History of the Works of the Learned* that were first published in that journal in 1738 and appeared soon afterwards collected under the title *A Vindication of Mr. Pope's "Essay on Man" from the Misinterpretations of Mr. de Crousaz* . . . , William Warburton (1698–1779), bishop of Gloucester from 1759 on and famous as author of *The Divine Legation of Moses* [4 vols. (London, 1738–65; reprint, New York: Garland, 1978)], defended Pope against the accusation raised by Jean Pierre de Crousaz (1663–1750), professor of philosophy and mathematics in Lausanne at the time, in his *Examen de l'Essai de Herr Pope sur l'homme* (Lausanne, 1737) that Pope appropriated Leibnizian determinism and other "dangerous" doctrines. A German translation of Warburton's defense was added to Brocke's translation of Pope's *Essay*. . . . (B. H. Brockes . . . *Aus dem Englischen übersetzter Versuch vom Menschen, des Herrn Alexander Pope, . . . nebst einer Vorrede und einem Anhange von Briefen, worinn die Einwürfe des Hrn. C(rousaz) wider den* 'Essay on Man' *beantwortet werden, aus der* History of the Works of the Learned *überstezet von B. J. Zinck* [Hamburg, 1740]). . . . {from LS's editorial annotations to *Pope!* 62.4–6 and 53.12–14 (JA II 383–84)}

12. On Prémontval (1716–64), see Bruno Strauss's editorial annotation at JA XI 391, in appendix 2, supplement to IPM XVIn12.

13. *Vues philosophiques* (Berlin, 1761), II, 139–40. {LS}

the Leibniz-Wolffian philosophy. A presupposition for this assertion was that Pope's doctrine is essentially identical with Leibniz's doctrine, or at least could be considered by the Berlin Academy as being identical with it. In fact, the Leibnizian Gottsched doubted this identity as little as did the anti-Leibnizian Crousaz. But Warburton's polemic against Crousaz showed that the identity was not self-evident. That is why the first task for Lessing and Mendelssohn was the investigation of the relationship of Pope and Leibniz. In this way, *Pope a Metaphysician!* is already distinguished from {xvii} all other statements prompted by the prize competition for 1755—if one disregards the few remarks of Kant's on this point, which do not go beyond suggestions occasioned by the prize question that are found in his unpublished writings:[14] Lessing and Mendelssohn see in the relationship of Pope's doctrine to Leibniz's a *problem*. Whereas for all the others it was just a matter of whether "Optimism" (the doctrine that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds)[15] is true or false, and whereas the adherents as well as the opponents of Leibniz who participated in the controversy had no doubt about the identity of the two doctrines, Lessing and Mendelssohn put that very identity into question. Still, this did not amount to a substantive criticism of the Berlin Academy's prize competition; for, in the first place, the prize competition explicitly called for the assessment of the relationship and the *distinction* between the Popeian and the Leibnizian doctrines,[16] and, in the second place, Maupertuis[17] was in any case actually convinced that an essential distinction *did* exist between these two doctrines.[18] The authors are not satisfied with indicating particular distinctions as regards the content, however; nor do they limit themselves—as the Leibnizians that they are—to defending Leibniz by attempting to demonstrate that those principles of Pope's that supposedly or actually disagree with his system are untenable; in all this, they would respond to the Academy's question and thereby accept it as meaningful. Nonetheless, the real aim of their writing is to reject the Academy's question as fundamentally

14. See "Abriss des Optimismus," in Rudolf Reicke, ed., *Lose Blätter aus Kants Nachlass* (Königsberg, 1889), I, 293ff. [Wal 78–83]. {LS}

15. On "Optimism," see LS's annotations to *Pope!* 46.8 and 47.7–10, in appendix appendix 2, supplement to IPM xviin15.

16. See annotation to *Pope!* 46.3ff. {LS}

For LS's editorial annotation to *Pope!* 46.3ff., see appendix 2, supplement to IPM xviin16.

17. On Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis (1698–1759), see Bruno Strauss's editorial annotation at JA XI 392, in appendix 2, supplements to IPM xviin17, xviin18, and xixn34, and ITE xlviin26.

18. See annotation to *Pope!* 64.10–38. {LS}

For LS's editorial annotation to *Pope!* 64.10–38, see appendix 2, supplement to IPM xviin18.

flawed. The pointing out of particular distinctions between the two doctrines is guided by the fundamental insight into the *necessity* of such distinctions. The doctrines of both men necessarily differ because Leibniz is a philosopher and Pope is a poet: what makes a philosophical doctrine a *philosophical* doctrine, namely, its *systematic* form, precludes its poetic, i.e., *sensuous*[19] presentation, and vice versa. Since that is so, Pope's and Leibniz's doctrines are not only necessarily distinct, but also fundamentally not comparable; and so the Academy's prize competition is fundamentally flawed. Careful attention must be paid to the limit of Lessing-Mendelssohn's assertion, {**xviii**} lest one find in the Pope writing, in obvious contradiction to the explicit opinion of the authors, who recognize Pope as a "philosophical poet" through and through,[20] a "peremptory rule of the separation of the philosopher from the poet."[21] In truth, the authors deny only the compatibility of philosophy as a "system of metaphysical truths"[22] with poetry; they do *not* deny, instead they assert, the compatibility of doctrine in general with poetry; not only do they not deny the possibility of didactic poetry in general, they show instead *how* didactic poetry is possible: didactic poetry is possible insofar as there are doctrines that are convincing not just by force of their systematic justification; of such a type are the "*specific moral principles*" on whose recognition "all philosophers[23] agree, however distinct their fundamental principles may also be." And Pope meant his *Essay on Man* to be a *moral* poem: it "was to be no unfruitful association of truths." *That*

19. Cf. IMH lxivn289.

20. See *Pope!* 50.31–32 [Gal 48]. {LS}

21. See Adolf von Harnack, *Geschichte der Königliche Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaft* (3 vols. in 4; Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1900), I, 1, 406. {LS}

22. See *Pope!* 49.20 [Gal 47].

23. Lessing and Mendelssohn's German word here is, in the singular, *Weltweise* (more or less literally, "worldly-wise")—rather than *Philosoph* ("philosopher"), which has been in use exclusively up until now in LS's introduction. When speaking in his own name, LS uses *Weltweise* only when referring to "a philosopher in the style of the eighteenth century" (IGC cii; cf. IMH xxii), i.e., as the equivalent of the French *philosophe* in its eighteenth-century usage. Since there does not seem to be any strict equivalent for this word in English, I will indicate by a footnote whenever "philosopher" is *Weltweise* (or *Weltweiser*) rather than *Philosoph*.

Similarly, I will also indicate where "philosophy" is *Weltweisheit* rather than *Philosophie*. According to J. C. Adelung's authoritative *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der hochdeutschen Mundart, mit beständiger Vergleichung der übrigen Mundarten, besonders aber der Oberdeutschen* (1811), *Weltweisheit* is "an expression that had been introduced a long time ago by now in preference to the foreign expression *Philosophie*" (s.v. *Weltweisheit*). Adelung defines *Weltweisheit* as "the knowledge of natural things in the world, how and why they are, and the sum of the truths of reason belonging to it" (*ibid.*). *Weltweisheit* is thus identified with modern natural science and the metaphysical arguments in support of it. In his Mendelssohn introductions, LS is careful to distinguish *Weltweisheit* from *Philosophie*—notably when calling attention to Leibniz's observation concerning the prevalence of "system" or "demonstration" which differentiates modern from premodern philosophy (IMH lxvi; cf. IPM xxff.).

is why he sought "a lively impression rather than a deep conviction"; *that is why* he wrote in verse, not in prose.[24] The distinction between poetry as sensuous language and philosophy as a system of abstract principles does not convey its real sense in itself; it points back to the distinction between theoretical and practical, between demonstrative and living, between clear and effective knowledge[25]—and, therefore, doctrine—, between knowledge and "the knowledge's life," therefore to a distinction without which Mendelssohn's *Treatise on Evidence*[26] and Lessing's *Treatise on Fables*[27] would be unintelligible.[28] About the significance this distinction has for Mendelssohn, the "Introduction to the *Treatise on Evidence*" has more to say.[29] What significance it has for the aforementioned treatise of Lessing's results from the principles that come to the fore in it: that anyone "who lets himself succumb to presenting anything other than an *ethical doctrine* in" the fable "abuses it";[30] that "fable has as its aim our clear and *living* knowledge of a *moral* principle";[31] that he (Lessing) in his own fables "always [had]" his "focus only on this or that *ethical doctrine*, which {**xix**} I was eager to examine in *specific*[32] cases mostly for my own edification."[33]

The most important *presupposition* of the Pope writing is therefore common to Lessing and Mendelssohn. Judged by its initial *purpose*, however, the writing seems to belong to Mendelssohn rather than to Lessing. For this purpose is manifestly the defense of Leibniz against an attack by the Berlin Academy, the same purpose, therefore, to which a part of the *Philosophical Dialogues* is devoted.[34] In any case, the aim of defending Leibnizian philosophy was less important to Lessing than to Mendelssohn. Meanwhile, both

24. *Pope!* 51 and 60 [cf. Gal 48, 52], as well as annotations *ad loc.* {LS}

For LS's editorial annotations to *Pope!* 51, see appendix 2, supplement to IPM xviiin24. There are no editorial annotations to *Pope!* 60.

25. Or: cognition. LS's German word throughout this discussion is *Erkenntnis*. See IMH xiin13. Earlier in LS's sentence, "sense" is *Sinn*, which elsewhere is either "sense" or "meaning" or "mind," depending on the context.

26. See *Evidenz* 313 and 325–28 [Dah 293, 303–306]. {LS}

27. *Abhandlung über die Fabeln* (1759), LM VII 415–79.

28. Lit.: unthinkable.

29. See especially ITE l–liii.

30. LM VII 427. The emphasis is Lessing's. It is worth noting that the German *Fabel* (like the Greek *muthos*) also means "plot." Cf. IMH lxxxvii–lxxxix.

31. LM VII 454. The emphases are LS's.

32. Or perhaps: *special*.

33. LM VII 472. The emphases are LS's.

34. Cf. JA I xx. {LS}

LS is citing Fritz Bamberger's brief historical account of the Berlin Academy's anti-Leibnizianism in the latter's editorial introduction to JA I (which contains Mendelssohn's *Philosophische Gespräche*). For Bamberger's account, see appendix 2, supplement to IPM xixn34.

authors were at one in the protest against the national arrogance of the countries to the west,[35] which they believed they recognized in the overrating of Pope by the English and the underrating of Leibniz by the French; and besides, the author of several "Vindications"[36] had a more general reason for protesting against an unjust and veiled attack. So *Pope a Metaphysician!* is well classified as both Lessing's and Mendelssohn's writing equally. If one now attempts to determine the share of each of the two authors in working out the writing, then in the absence of direct attestations one must proceed, so it seems offhand, from the general impression that can be gained of Lessing's and Mendelssohn's style, interests, and expertises from their other writings in this period of their literary activity. With the support of this impression, it is generally asserted that the real investigation (the establishing of Pope's doctrine, the comparing of this doctrine with the doctrine of Leibniz's, the critique of particular principles of Pope's)[37] goes back to Mendelssohn, whereas the introduction (the "Preamble" and the "Precursory Investigation of Whether a Poet as Poet could Have a System"),[38] the conclusion[39] and the editing of the whole are ascribed to Lessing. Closer investigation confirms the dominant view. On the one hand, it is shown that the "Preamble" agrees with Lessing's letter to Mendelssohn of February 18, 1755,[40] and the "Precursory Investigation" agrees with corresponding passages from Lessing's "Vindications of Horace" (1754), that therefore these parts of the Pope writing agree, in part literally, with approximately contemporaneous statements of Lessing's.[41] On the other hand, the thesis that characterizes the Pope investigation {xx} and Pope critique is, in substance, contradicted most incisively by Lessing in his fragment "The Christianity of Reason" (1753), which is also only a little older than the Pope writing: especially in §17 of this fragment, Lessing appropriates the doctrine of the hierarchical ordering of being, which in the Pope writing is oddly contested as *the* un-Leibnizian and absurd doctrine of Pope's. It is very unlikely

35. Lit.: the western peoples.

36. I.e., Lessing. See his "Rettungen des Horaz" [Vindications of Horace] (LM V 272–309), "Rettung des Cardanus" [Vindication of Cardanus] (LM V 310–33), "Rettung des *Inepti Religiosi*" [Vindication of the "Pious Fool"] (LM V 334–52), and "Rettung des Cochläus aber nur in einer Kleinigkeit" [Vindication of Cochläus, but Only on a Small Point] (LM V 353–67).

37. *Pope!* 52–72 [Gal 48–57].

38. *Pope!* 47–52 [Gal 46–48].

39. *Pope!* 72–80 [Gal 57–59].

40. JA XI 14.

41. See annotations to *Pope!* 45.18 and 51.27–36. {LS}

For LS's editorial annotation to *Pope!* 45.18, see appendix 2, supplement to IPM xixn41.

For LS's editorial annotations to *Pope!* 51.27–36, see appendix 2, supplement to IPM xviiin24.

that the author of "Christianity of Reason" wrote the Pope critique in *Pope a Metaphysician!*;[42] and in view of the central passage that takes up the aforementioned critique in the context of the investigation concerning Pope and Leibniz,[43] the received assigning of this investigation to Mendelssohn is thereby justified. It can be objected that Lessing "was put off at once" from the theses of "Christianity of Reason" right after writing it by Mendelssohn's critique.[44] Nevertheless, as comes out in Mendelssohn's letter to Lessing of February 1, 1774,[45] this critique is directed only against Lessing's speculations about the Trinity that are found in the aforementioned fragment; and besides, "being put off" means only that Lessing gave up his preoccupation with the theses of the fragment for the time being—in §73 of "The Education of the Human Race"[46] he again takes up his thoughts on the Trinity—, it does not mean that he would have rejected these theses as absurd on the basis of Mendelssohn's critique and would have asserted their contrary, even if only initially.

42. Cf. especially *Pope!* 67.11–28 and annotation *ad loc*. {LS}
For LS's editorial annotations to *Pope!* 67.11–28, see appendix 2, supplement to IPM xxn42.

43. I.e., *Pope!* 67.11–28. For this passage, see the translator's footnote to appendix 2, supplement to IPM xxn42.

44. See his letter to Mendelssohn of May 1, 1774 [JA XII.2 47]. {LS}

45. JA XII.2 40–41.

46. LM XIII 430–31; cf. Cha 94–95; cf. Nis 234–35. For my own translation of this passage, see appendix 4.